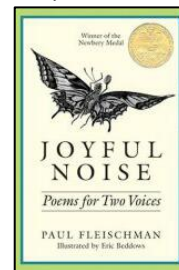


Responding to Comparison/Contrast through Writing:

A Poem for Two Voices

Two-sentence summary: After students compare and contrast two items, they compose a poem for two voices in the “voice” of the two items. These poems should then be read aloud by two students, each assuming one of the voices from the poem.

Background knowledge needed: Joyful Noise by Paul Fleischman is a marvelous collection that celebrates the “poem for two voices” as a poetic genre, and it’s a great book to have on-hand if you want to use the poem for two voices as a classroom writing technique. This type of poem is composed to be read aloud by two (sometimes even three) readers. Most lines in these poems are spoken by the individual reader separately, and the speakers take turns going back and forth between the voices; however, some lines are composed to be said out loud together by both speakers.



In the following two-voice poem, for example, the first line (*I am the polar bear*) is spoken alone by reader #1, and it is immediately followed by the solo reading of the second line (*I am the SUV*) by reader #2. The lines then are shared back and forth by the individuals, until they come to the last line (*Ice caps*), which is intended to be spoken out loud by both readers simultaneously. This coordination of voices requires some rehearsal by students before they perform, so be sure to allow time for rehearsal.

An example poem for two voices
written by NNWP consultant Campbell Pontius

Voice #1:

I am a polar bear
I eat fish
I must swim for my food
But I can't swim forever
When I get tired
I depend upon

Voice #2:

I am an SUV
I guzzle petroleum
People pump mine
I burn gas pretty fast
When I pollute
I begin to destroy

Ice caps.

Comparing/Contrasting: Many contrasting topics lend themselves very nicely to this poetic format. As seen in the example above, these poems—when well-written—rely heavily on interesting verbs that are associated with the contrasting topics. As students brainstorm, have them make lists of contrasting verbs.

Differentiating Instruction Ideas: Students can write these poems alone or in pairs. If students do write them alone, they can partner up after the poems are written and help each other revise and perform their poetry.

A thought on the writing task: These small pieces of writing naturally lend themselves to performance by the authors, but the performances do not have to be whole-class; students can just as easily perform for each other in groups of four or six or eight.

a practice worksheet for students

First, look over this example. How do you think it should be read aloud? In what order?

Next, work with a partner and think of two things that are sometimes alike and sometimes different. Compose a short poem for two voices in the space below. Use strong verbs!

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This resource is featured in the Northern Nevada Writing Project's *Going Deep with Comparison & Contrast Thinking Guide*.
Visit the NNWP's website (<http://nnwp.org>) to inquire about ordering a copy.